

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and an Exchange With Reporters

April 21, 2010

The President. All right, everybody. We are here to talk about the Supreme Court. Obviously, we have lost one of—the services of one of the finest Supreme Court Justices that we've seen. Justice Stevens announced that he will be retiring at the end of this term. Those are going to be some tough shoes to fill. This is somebody who operated with extraordinary integrity and fidelity to the law.

But I'm confident that we can come up with a nominee who will gain the confidence of the Senate and the confidence of the country and the confidence of individuals who look to the Court to provide evenhanded justice to all Americans.

Last time, when I nominated Sonia Sotomayor, I have to say that all of the individuals who are sitting here—Mitch McConnell, Harry Reid, Jeff Sessions, and Patrick Leahy—worked very cooperatively on what I considered to be a smooth, civil, thoughtful nomination process and confirmation process. And I very much thank, particularly, the ranking member and the chairman of the Judiciary Committee for running a smooth process.

My hope is, is that we can do the exact same thing—same thing this time. Last time, the nomination went up at the end of May. We are certainly going to meet that deadline, and we hope maybe we can accelerate it a little bit so that we have some additional time. But my hope is, is that we're going to be able to get a Supreme Court nominee confirmed in time for the next session.

As Justice Stevens said, I think it's very important, particularly given the important cases that may be coming before the Supreme Court, that we get this process wrapped up so that a new Justice can be seated and staffed and can work effectively with his or her colleagues in time for the fall session.

So I just want to again thank all of these gentlemen for their input. They are here to consult with me. One of the things that we did last time was to listen to the thoughts and views of our colleagues before I nominated a candidate. I take this process very seriously. And so I'm going to be interested in hearing their thoughts and concerns before any final decisions are made.

All right. With that, let me call on one question. Ben [Ben Feller, Associated Press], you get the shot.

Abortion Rights

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Would you be willing to nominate someone who did not support a woman's right to choose?

The President. You know, I am somebody who believes that women should have the ability to make, often, very difficult decisions about their own bodies and issues of reproduction. Obviously, this has been a hugely contentious issue in our country for a very long time. I will say the same thing that every President has said since this issue came up, which is, I don't have litmus tests around any of these issues.

But I will say that I want somebody who is going to be interpreting our Constitution in a way that takes into account individual rights, and that includes women's rights. And that's going to be something that's very important to me, because I think part of what our core Constitution—constitutional values promote is the notion that individuals are protected in their privacy and their bodily integrity, and women are not exempt from that.

All right? Thank you. I appreciate it.

President's Supreme Court Nominee

Q. Are you getting close to a decision?

The President. You know, I think we've got some terrific potential candidates.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Congress :: Congressional leaders and Senate Judiciary Committee members, meeting; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Leahy, Patrick J.; McConnell, Addison M. "Mitch"; Reid, Harry; Sessions, Jefferson B., III; Sotomayor, Sonia; Stevens, John P.

Subjects: Congress : Members, meetings with President; Congress : Senate :: Judiciary Committee; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Health and medical care : Abortion; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice, retirement.

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